



Dear self

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This text was originally read by Rosana Cade at the The Art of Care-full Practice Symposium on 5 March 2017.

Dear self,

Breathe.

Well done. You are here. You made it out of bed, and even though you feel really nervous, and all those familiar voices in your head have been telling you that you aren't good enough, and that everyone else is much more intelligent, or relevant, or witty, or academic, or insightful, or experienced, you are overcoming your fear and writing here. That is a brave thing to do.

You are brave. I know you don't like it or believe it when people say that to you, but you are. Putting yourself in front of people, be it to perform, or to facilitate, or to talk on a regular basis, makes you vulnerable. You are repeatedly exposing yourself. It takes a certain resilience to be in this kind of role, and recently, you have been finding that harder. You need some strength to be this brave.

There were times last year when you were performing and facilitating a lot; you didn't have a day off for two months, and were barely at home, and then, when you finally took a day off, you just cried all day, feeling incredibly anxious and

you couldn't enjoy yourself.

You don't think you need to give yourself a break, but you do. Maybe you see it as a sign of weakness, or not being a fully committed artist. You need to learn not to take on too much. You don't have infinite energy to give out. Put some energy into yourself. Treat yourself like one of your participants. What do you say to them? 'Listen to yourself', 'All feelings are allowed', 'Stay present', 'Check in with yourself', 'If you need to stop at any time, let me know and you can stop', 'Nothing is more important than your wellbeing'.

And yet you feel so self-indulgent saying these things to yourself.

Audre Lorde wrote: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare' (1988, p.131).

You think you're privileged. That you shouldn't complain. That you shouldn't be feeling down. That you don't deserve to be looked after, or that there isn't time to look after yourself when the world is in such a mess. You want to give your energy to helping others, but you don't always know how, or you feel overwhelmed by how awful everything is, and you end up living in a state of fear and inaction.

You don't think you deserve care, or you don't need it. That your practice should be for others and not for yourself. And yet, you've been feeling so low. You are a queer woman in the time of Donald Trump and Theresa May. You suffer misrecognition, you don't feel represented. You are allowed to create something for yourself.

You are feeling confused at the moment, but that's OK.

You're OK. You're not a bad person. You are allowed to stop. You are allowed to spend time not engaging in art or research.

Sometimes you forget that the process is for you, as much as for the other people engaging in it. You aren't above the need for art. You create these spaces so that you can be open, connect with people in a meaningful way. You gain insights and support from the people you meet and work with. You've been questioning the role of art in the world, and what effect you are having in these alarming times, and yet you forget how much art means to you, and the effect it has on you and your well-being.

Does that lessen as you get older and art becomes your career? Do you need to find space to enjoy performance for the joy of performance, and not as a place of work? You've started to feel guilty for engaging in processes that you enjoy, as if your work is only valuable if it's hard or if you are sacrificing something. Where has this ideology come from? I don't think you really believe that. Punishing yourself won't solve the problems of the world.

You're confused about the boundaries of caring for the self and caring for others and the world. There's something about self-care that feels selfish to you, or like it will cut you off from caring about the world. And in current times, with this government, with the awful cuts, the relentless individualistic ideology fuelling feelings of competitiveness, the rise in people begging on the streets, the media telling you that you and all your friends are out of touch with the real people, you are wary of focusing on yourself.

Knowing how to live is not easy. Carving out an ethical life is not easy. We exist in structures that make it very difficult, and you are doing your best. You can't do everything. Some

days you can't do anything. It doesn't make you a less valuable human being.

It's hard to know exactly what you need in any moment in order to feel well, to feel like yourself. You don't need to buy into a pre-packaged commodified version of self-care.

You are fragile like everyone else. You are vulnerable like everyone else.

You are feeling confused at the moment, but that's OK. You're OK. You're not a bad person.

Be kind to yourself.

I'm not sure how to finish this letter.

I will do my best to be kind to you.

Take care.

x

References

Lorde, A., 1988. *A burst of light*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.

About the author

ROSANA CADE is a queer artist based in Glasgow. For her, queerness means rebellion, imagination and celebration: 'Rebel passionately against anything that tells you how to be normal, wildly imagine new ways of being/doing/thinking/seeing/moving, and celebrate ferociously all those who are under-celebrated'. In 2011, Rosana

created *Walking:Holding*, shown extensively across the UK and internationally, and which continues to tour across the world to great acclaim. She regularly collaborates with her partner Eilidh MacAskill, with whom she has recently created MOOT MOOT. Rosana is co-founder of //BUZZCUT//, a collaboration dedicated to creating holistic and progressive environments for artists and audiences to experiment with live performance in Glasgow.